

The INQUIRER

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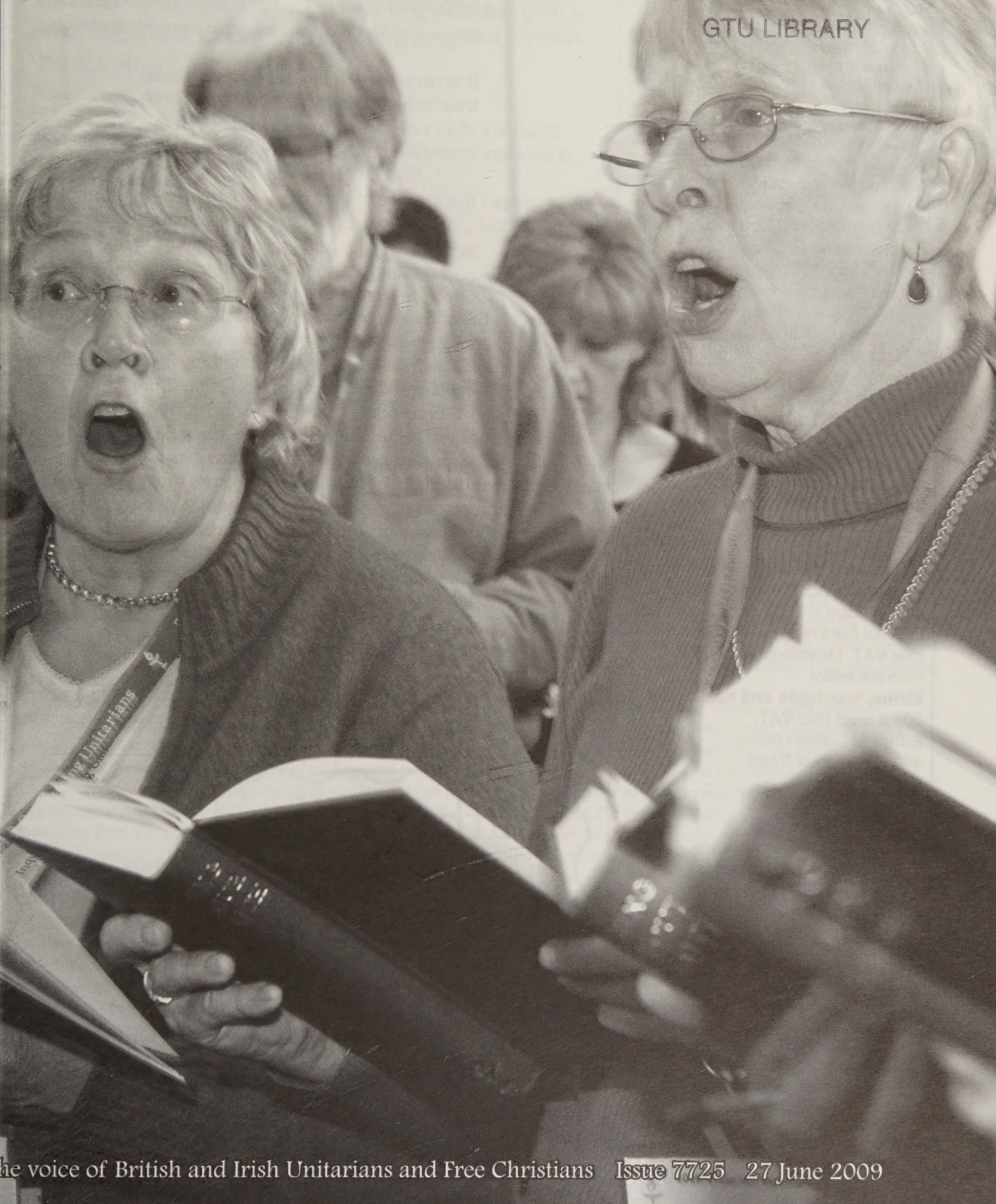
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Sing' a bestseller!

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Inquiring Words

A Litany for Our Time – Tom Paine

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country ...

Tyranny, like hell is not easily conquered.

My country is the world, and my religion is to do good. A thing moderately good is not so good as it ought to be. Moderation in temper is always a virtue; but moderation in principle is always a vice.

It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself.

Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving, it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe.

My mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolise power and profit.

Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man.

He who is the author of a war lets loose the whole contagion of hell and opens a vein that bleeds a nation to death.

He that in defence of reason rebels against tyranny has a better title to Defender of the Faith, than George the Third.

When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary.

One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests.

He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from opposition; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach himself.

If we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately.

I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

We have it in our power to begin the world over again

– A litany created by the Rev Richard Boeke using the words of Tom Paine, who died 200 years ago this month.

Faith in Words

The Inquirer's annual collection of worship material gathered from across the movement will appear on 8 August.

Please contribute original prayers, meditations and sermons. Contributions from children are especially welcome – including their art work – so perhaps some Sunday clubs will get involved. Submissions are due on 10 July. E-mail submissions or questions to inquirer@btinternet.com

Words and . . .

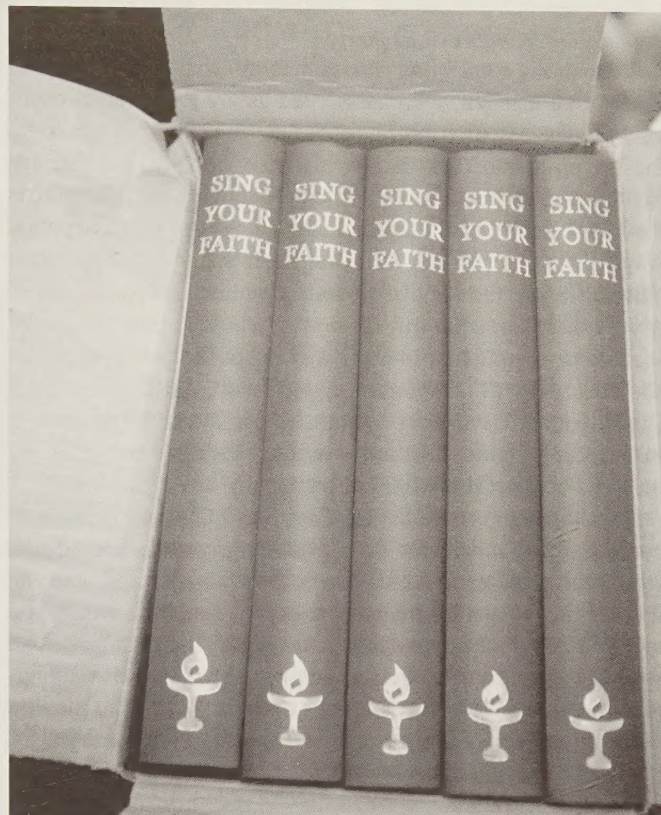
The first run of *Sing Your Faith* has sold out and a new order is with the printers. **Kate Taylor** spoke with some of the writers who helped create this Unitarian 'bestseller'.

What inspires people to write hymns? Andrew Hill, joint editor of *Sing Your Faith*, who has written 20 of its hymns, told me that, coming from a Unitarian family, he was 'born with a Unitarian hymn book in his mouth'. He has always sung hymns, 'vigorously and unashamedly'. Many readers will be familiar particularly with his 'Honourable Saints' which was published in *Hymns for Living* 24 years ago. But Andrew, now living in retirement in York, is a strong advocate of new hymns. Old ones, he says, are like 'elderly favourite aunts: you have to let them go for the next generation'.

Sing Your Faith includes the work of just fewer than 20 living British Unitarian authors. New hymns, of course, reflect the contemporary breadth of Unitarianism and our eclectic interests. Roger Mason, now professor of Geology at the China University of Geosciences in Wuhan and a member at Golders Green, has drawn on the Taoist tradition for 'Shining through the Universe runs the Golden Thread'. (The tune David Dawson has composed for this is itself named The Golden Thread.) Glasgow artist Lyanne Mitchell, a member of the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network, is, she says, 'always inspired by nature and being close to the earth'. Her 'Spirit of Earth, root, stone and tree,' just came to her as she was walking in one of her favourite places. Andrew Parker's 'Let us sing of earth's progression' developed from hearing about Lindisfarne's Cuthbert and the seals, and reflects his theology of evolution.

Some of our writers have come to Unitarianism from other traditions. Barbara Russell, who is the correspondent for the Black Country group of Unitarian churches, was brought up as an Anglican but found aspects of its doctrine, and especially the creed, unacceptable. 'The heart cannot worship what the mind does not accept', she says. Her hymn 'God of every stone and pebble' was inspired by her love of geology and celebrates the manifestation of the divine in the earth, the arts, and all living beings. David Doel, now living in retirement in Dukinfield where he held his last ministry, was in his youth a Methodist local preacher. His moving hymn 'When the song of life is ringing' reflects his experience of deep depression and the dark night of the soul, 'when life's harsh road has brought us only hurt and grief and pain.'

'Unitarianism', says David, 'gave me a family to belong to and a freedom I dearly longed for, enabling me to value the rich contemplative literature of all the great religions of the world. It allowed me to interpret the life and teachings of Jesus not as literal fact but as rich allegory, informing all the struggles I had with my personal and spiritual life. As allegory, the suffering and resurrection of Jesus becomes so much more relevant and beautifully appropriate to our lives; so much more so than the crude literalism that makes Jesus scarcely human and his experience peculiar to his role in history rather than



Copies of the new hymn book flew out of the book stall at the General Assembly meetings. Photo by James Barry

capturing profound truths about the journey of every human soul in search of the Love of God that lives at the very heart, in the depths, of each one of us.'

Richard Boeke's inspiration comes from his half century of work in interfaith relations, and his universalism, as well as from his love of the natural world. His new Easter hymn, set to a traditional tune sung in many churches on Easter Sunday, ends

'Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, Alleluia!

All are ways for love in you, Alleluia!

Many rainbows share one sun, Alleluia!

In the many, God is one. Alleluia!

Richard, living in retirement in Sussex, is the vice-president of the World Congress of Faiths. He speaks of the influence of the work of Oscar Hammerstein and claims that songs are more effective than sermons.

Peter Galbraith, who has three hymns in the new book and two in *Hymns for Living*, has moved away from organized Unitarianism. Formerly active in the Leicester area, and at one time a deputy editor of *The Inquirer*, he is now living in Nant Y Moel, Wales, where he continues to contribute to the local community, notably by helping to found a food co-operative, helping to run a campaigning and support group for the over-50s, and starting a movement to preserve and re-open a community theatre. His hymn 'O let us now our voices raise in invocation and in praise', which speaks of the need for integrity and compassion, might well have been written for Andrew Hill's unashamed vigour!

(Music on next page)

Music!



(Continued from previous page)

Some of the contributors are both hymn writers and composers. Myrna Michell, who has served as lay pastor at Rawtenstall for the past two years and is moving this summer to be the lay pastor at York, has written the words and music for two hymns, 'In the morning when the dawn breaks far across the land', and 'This is the moment when we go our separate ways'. The latter words were written to mark the point when children leave the service to follow junior-church activities. Myrna discovered her gift for setting words to music then she worked as a volunteer in a primary school in the 1980s. But, she adds, 'It was only once I had 'found' Unitarianism (and I'm sure it had never been lost) that I also found the possibility to express religious instincts without feeling constrained by imposed beliefs which I didn't personally hold.'

Don Meacham, organist at Ullet Road Church, Liverpool, composed the music for Peter Samson's words, 'Bread and wine are of the earth,' but Don is also a writer and sent me five further hymns for which he has provided both words and music. He told me how he first came to play the organ when he was serving in the army in Hamburg in the 1950s and was 'happily intimidated' by a 'marvellous Scots woman' into playing (and furiously pedalling) a small harmonium for a service for the troops in a small city chapel. He found Unitarianism when another 'indefatigable' woman 'of a certain age' asked him to give a talk at Ullet Road and subsequently called on him in an emergency to play 'for one service' – 11 years ago!

At Ipswich, the happy combination of minister Cliff Reed and organist Robert Waller, a process engineer in the electronics industry, has provided the words and music for 'God around us, God within us,' and the Christmas hymn, 'Now rejoice! We greet his coming'.

Peter Sampson is the secretary of the congregation at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, where Alan Myerscough, in his

role as caretaker, used to look after members of the Hymn Book Panel most thoughtfully whilst serving on the Panel himself as a very able musician (with a background in the Anglo-Catholic tradition of English cathedral church music and church choirs). In another happy partnership, Alan has composed the music for Peter's 'Strong and Steadfast'.

We have two hymns by the late Frank Claburn in *Sing Your Faith*. The tune for his 'I stand outside your door. Will you admit me?' has been composed ('to order' after David Dawson appealed to him) by Alan Williams, Reader in Music at the University of Salford and a member of Oldham Unitarian Chapel. Alan has called his tune Caleb, the name of his youngest child.

Providing names for their tunes must be both fun and a challenge. Another of Alan's tunes in *Sing Your Faith* is named Adelphi, after the street where his University department is situated. David Dawson, joint editor with Andrew Hill of the new book, has contributed a good many tunes, some given Yorkshire place names like Wharfedale, or Olicana, the ancient name for Ilkley.

Instrumentalist and music teacher Jean Hytch told me that her tune *Pacem Cordium* was written at a family holiday conference at Great Hucklow. It is the setting for Kath Mayor's words, 'Your life is good, is good, my friends'.

The words of many of the hymns in *Sing Your Faith* have been written with well-known tunes in mind. We might, I rather think, have had more than a score of hymns all set to Sibelius's *Finlandia*. But one of the many joys of exploring the book is discovering what contemporary Unitarians have composed.

Kate Taylor is a member of the Lindsey Press Panel, publisher of *Sing Your Faith*. The order for a second print run has been made and the books will soon be available from Essex Hall.

Hymn sing brought voices together



More than 30 Midlands Unitarians gathered at Kingswood Meeting House on a warm and sunny Saturday afternoon, to join with Rev Ant Howe and the talented choir and organist from Kingswood, to learn some hymns from the new purple hymn book, *Sing Your Faith*. The gathering had been organised by the Warwickshire and Neighbouring Counties Monthly Meeting of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, known to its friends as the Ministers' Meeting, to encourage Midlands congregations to give the new hymn book a try.

Ant and his helpers took us through nine new hymns, some of which were quite easy to sing, some of which were a bit trickier. We all enjoyed the words of the new hymns, by talented contemporary Unitarians, and did our best to sing our faith loud and clear.

Then after a short break for tea and delicious cakes provided by the Kingswood congregation, Ant led us in a short service, using three of the hymns we had learned. All in all, it was an inspirational afternoon, and we left full of plans to use the new hymn book as soon as possible. Photo by Bob Edwards

– Sue Woolley, MUA District Facilitator

UUA: A public witness reflects

The Rev William G. Sinkford completes his second and final term as president of the Unitarian Universalist Association of American Congregations (UUA) at their General Assembly in June. Christopher L. Walton, executive editor of *UU World* magazine sat down with him to talk about his eight-year administration.

UU World: *Your administration has shifted how the UUA relates to international Unitarian groups and to other interfaith groups. What do you see as the future of international engagement for UU congregations?*

Sinkford: We're in the middle, or perhaps the beginning, of a process that will, I think, deepen the international engagement of our congregations. And that deepening of engagement will lead to a deepening and enriching of the spiritual lives of our people. I think it's very exciting. There are many, many signs of this. One is the expansion of the Partner Church Program beyond just partnerships with congregations in Transylvania to new partnerships with the Philippines and Khasi Hills [in India]. There will be partnerships with African UU congregations, which I think is very exciting ...

And in terms of our interfaith work, we really have shifted away from a focus on particular organisations, like IARF [the International Association for Religious Freedom] or the World Conference of Religions for Peace, to one which will engage our congregations more directly. It's fine for the UUA president to show up at this board meeting and that board meeting. It's much better, deeper, and richer if a particular congregation can be in authentic relationship with a faith tradition [or congregation] from another part of the world.

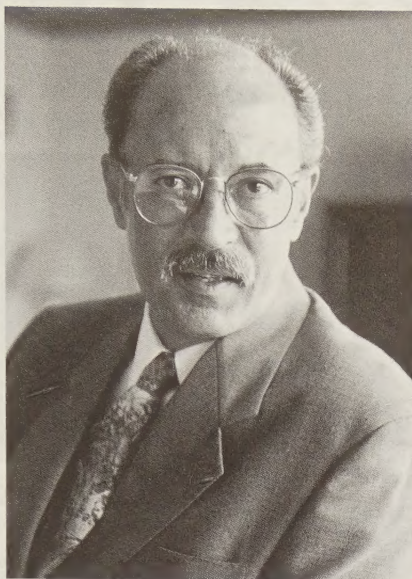
UU World: *What public witness or public visibility initiatives are you most proud of during your presidency?*

Sinkford: Marriage equality would be right at the top of the list. Our witness there is both deeply grounded and our congregations have been doing the work of welcoming BGLT [bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender] folks for decades. Although there was a setback in California on November 4, the UU Legislative Ministry was acknowledged as the most effective religious advocacy group [working] to maintain marriage equality in California...

The chance to go to Chad and witness the refugee situation for the folks fleeing Darfur with [Unitarian Universalist Service Committee President] Charlie Clements would also be high on my list ...

UU World: *What do you see as Unitarian Universalism's healing message in the context of the current economic crisis?*

Sinkford: As more and more people are getting more and more anxious about the impact of the recession on their lives, I think our healing message remains the same: that we are all in this together and that attempts to divide us one from another are to be resisted at all costs. Ours is fundamentally a message of inclusion, which recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and that each and every person is a blessing—or can be a blessing, if we stay in right relationship. Our goal



The Rev William Sinkford
UUA photo

is to create the beloved community where each and every human being is honoured.

UU World: *In 2003, you urged Unitarian Universalists to find ways to engage with explicitly religious language again, provoking what people have called the "language of reverence" debate ...*

Sinkford: The UUA Principles are a wonderful ethical framework, but they don't pretend to get to spiritual depth. My wish has always been that Unitarian Universalists will find more pathways that can get them below the neck. We tend to be very heady, and we need to marry that to a more emotional and spiritual way of being religious people. In terms of the Purposes and Principles, I always thought that what we needed most was a greater sense of mission rather than a revision of the Principles themselves. And I had hoped that we would be moving toward a statement of purpose

which is closer to a statement of our mission in the world.

UU World: *Have you noticed anything shifting in the worship style or in the religious experience of the hundreds of congregations that you've visited?*

Sinkford: Oh absolutely. Worship is becoming more soul-satisfying in our congregations and less a purely intellectual experience. I see it in many ways. It's amazing how many congregations have taken up the habit of singing two or three hymns prior to worship to get people into that space. I think it's also true, and I've heard this from numerous colleagues, that my willingness to step out front on the language of reverence actually freed them to be more honest about their own spiritual lives with their congregations. It's almost as if it allowed some folks to come out of the closet.

UU World: *What have you found spiritually challenging about your role as president and what have you found spiritually helpful?*

Sinkford: My personal spiritual practice is prayer, and it always includes an element of gratitude for the many, many blessings of my life. And I try to get from that gratitude to the sense of humility. I'm not always successful, but I try to get there. But sitting in this beautiful huge office, one of the best offices in the city of Boston, with a staff of over 200, always raises the danger of arrogance. And so I've tried to be very mindful of that, I think with some success.

The other spiritual challenge is that this is a very demanding job, and it would be very easy to make it a 24/7/365-a-year commitment and lose any sense of personal boundaries. I've been so blessed by having [my wife] Maria with me. So I look forward to going home, and at the same time, she's travelled with me quite a bit. She loves the church and she loves our faith, and so she actually believes I'm doing the right ministry. So it's been a real blessing.

The Rev William Sinkford steps down as president at the UUA General Assembly meetings in Salt Lake City. Laurel Hallman or Peter Morales are candidates to succeed him.

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United by values, no

A quest for oneness and interest in orb phenomenon, brought **John Pickering** to Unitarian faith. Here, he recounts the journey.

The world we all know is changing on many levels. Two important changes in my own life recently – firstly my partner Katie and I had a book published and, secondly, we joined our local Unitarian Chapel. In one sense these two changes in our lives were connected. Here's how this came to be:

Last spring, driving through the High Desert in California, we saw a man ahead of us, walking along the dusty road. He was carrying a large, heavy, wooden cross. Intrigued, and needing some directions anyway, I stopped the car.

It turned out he was a fundamentalist preacher, famous throughout America for his mission to carry the Cross of Christ across every state in the US. He was quite helpful in terms of directions to the next town, but in terms of any spiritual destination it was like talking with someone from a bygone age. His right-wing views and End Time theology were vividly expressed by his belief that “nuking Iran” was a good idea because it would bring about Armageddon and hasten the return of Jesus.

‘Praise the Lord’

Thankfully Katie said ‘Praise the Lord’ in the appropriate places and we soon waved goodbye to the cross-carrying preacher. Diplomatically we didn't mention that a couple of days earlier we'd been in Palm Springs, at an international conference entitled: *‘Orbs: Interacting with other Realms’*. People had come from all over the globe to share information about this intriguing phenomenon. The presenters included a leading theoretical physicist, an ex-NASA scientist, a professor of theology – and us. We were there because of our book, *Beyond Photography*, which was the culmination of four years of experiences and hundreds of hours of photographs and research into the subject of orbs and related phenomena. *Beyond Photography* was the first book in the world to investigate and photographically document these extraordinary manifestations. As a result, we were in-demand for interviews and conferences. Although we had no preconceptions to offer – our perspective was, and is, to discover the truth about Reality – whatever that may be.

Orbs are part of that quest. The orb phenomenon is being photographed by people all over the world and has caught the interest of researchers and scientists from diverse backgrounds. Whatever people may think of them – orbs are an undeniable phenomenon. This is not an article about orbs, though, rather it is about how an aspect of that phenomenon resulted in Katie and I becoming members of our local Unitarian Chapel.

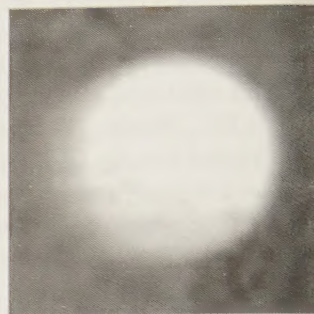
How does this relate to orbs? Well, interestingly the orb phenomenon crosses all religious boundaries. Orbs are a ubiquitous phenomenon, they are everywhere, (including the General Assembly meetings – see photo) photographed by all kinds of people all over the world with all kinds of cameras: digital, film, analogue and video – even by CCTV! Perhaps most relevant to us as Unitarians is the inherent symbolism of the phenomenon: the circle, the orb, the sphere: all ancient symbols of Oneness. Circular symbolism, as demonstrated by the work of Carl Jung, touches

ORBS and LUMINOSITIES



ORBS:

Appearing as flat, disk-like circles on photographs, they are usually invisible to the naked eye.



LUMINOSITIES:

Sphere-like and usually visible, they are often caught on camera as moving white lights.

us all subconsciously, and the concept of Oneness is something shared by most people studying the phenomenon. Coincidentally these visual symbols are appearing at a time when Oneness is critically meaningful to us at many levels: certainly spiritual and ecologically.

In terms of the arising new scientific paradigm, orbs provide a visual metaphor for the connective quantum reality underpinning our physical universe.

‘Oneness’ led to Unitarianism

It was this awareness of Oneness, of Unity, which led us to look further into the principles of Unitarianism – even though our contact with Unitarians began quite prosaically. For about four years Katie and I had been going along to the Unitarian School room in Kendal for tea and biscuits on Wednesday or Saturday morning before we actually came to a service. Then, Celia Cartwright, the new minister, invited us to the Christmas service. We thought ‘Oh, that's a good idea, let's do that!’ The more we looked into the Unitarian faith, the more parallels we saw with our own spiritual perspectives – which I suspect would be the case for many non-Unitarians, if only they could be persuaded to look at Unitarianism more closely. Though ‘newbies’ in Unitarian terms, Katie and I have both had previous experience of the Christian faith. In my own case, during the 1960-‘70's I was interested enough to study comparative religion and systematic theology at LBC and other colleges, but inevitably my spiritual horizons broadened beyond Christianity. This probably accounted for the ‘shock-horror’ reactions from a couple of close friends who saw our joining the local Unitarian Chapel as a ‘backward step into a religious package’ – quite an understandable reaction, because historically religion has sought to control or destroy the individual human spirit.

Rather than unifying the world, religion has divided it. There are self-evident truths. The cross-carrying fundamentalist preacher we met on the desert road was a typical example of a religious mindset. However, at base level, ‘religion’, just like, schoolyard gangs or bird-spotting clubs is merely a natural expression of

divided by doctrines

That humans are social creatures: we gravitate to the company of those with similar interests: we like to share our thoughts and preoccupations with kindred spirits. I don't think we should bury the religious baby out with the holy water: we just need to bear that all religion is created by humans for human needs, that no specific one has been ordained by God as the sole authority of all truth.

Seeking a similar path

Spiritually aware individuals we may be drawn towards people who are following a similar path and in that sense joining in. There is often a positive use of choice in the prevailing moral and social environment.

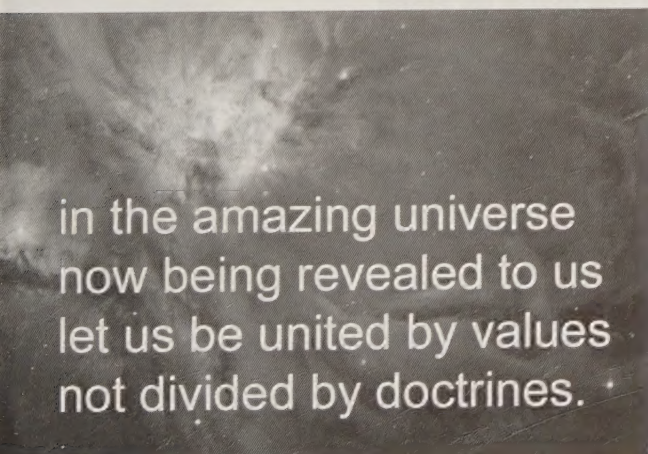
It was with our decision to join our local Unitarian Chapel: especially in the light of what we are beginning to understand, about the quantum nature of Reality, and what we ourselves had seen and experienced during our own lives: in particular through our research into the orb phenomenon.

When asked, 'Why on earth did you become a Unitarian?' I had to give it some thought and came up with the following personal reasons: Firstly: I believe it is important for any advancement of humanity's spiritual quest to be united by values, not divided by doctrines.

Secondly: both science and metaphysics reveal a universe in which all things are connected: Oneness is not only fundamental to quantum theory it is also a spiritual dynamic which can actually change us as individuals, and thereby change society. Theoretically Unitarianism embraces both these points and, in fact, in practical terms provides us with an inclusive circle which draws people in – as opposed to the narrow minded, doctrine based religious circles which shut people out. In western society we now have a huge number of people who are popularly identified as SBNR – spiritual but not religious. So in today's world it seems there are more potential Unitarians out there than ever before, which means that Unitarianism itself must have enormous potential as one of the most relevant faiths for the 21st century: not least because awareness of Oneness, of Unity, is coming more clearly into focus in the general consciousness.

A small world, an ordinary star

Put this all in perspective, we are one small world orbiting a very ordinary star at the edge of a vast city of stars we call the



in the amazing universe
now being revealed to us
let us be united by values
not divided by doctrines.

Postcard created by John Pickering©



Katie Hall photographed orbs at the Anniversary Service held at the GA meetings.

Milky Way. Even travelling at over 300,000 miles per second it takes our solar system over 200 million years to do a complete rotation of the galaxy. In this astronomical context it seems ludicrous for human beings to be divided by the vagaries of theology. When we first saw our world from space we saw a sphere, an orb – a symbol of Oneness – and I would venture to say that any religion which does not reflect that Oneness, in some way, is making itself spiritually irrelevant – and ultimately relegating itself to the past tense.

We can only become a multi-faith world if we are united by values not divided by doctrines! Is this not something worth working towards?

I believe the challenge for Unitarianism today is to realise its part in the spiritual destiny of the human race. Every time we light the Chalice flame, whether we realise it or not, we are manifesting a fundamental cosmic and spiritual principle: Oneness. The Light that is One, though the flames be many! The basic and profound truths enshrined in Unitarianism have never been more relevant than they are today.

So for myself, I would say that becoming a Unitarian is certainly not a backward step at all, in fact it is a positive choice to make, not least because of what the principles of Unitarianism offer for the spiritual future of humanity!

Everything we heard and experienced at our first General Assembly meetings in April confirmed to us that Unitarianism is a cause worth promoting because it has within it the seeds for spiritual growth and change which can transform our society and make for a better future for our children! This, to me, was essentially the message underlying most of what was spoken of at the GA.

It is a time of opportunity – it is an exciting time to be a Unitarian!

©John Pickering 2009

John Pickering and Katie Hall attend Kendal Unitarian Chapel. Visit John & Katie's website at: www.lights2beyond.com
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Star must be an Angel (Alexander)

By Jim McKenna

I saw a photograph of an angel, Alexander Angel, and it made me cry. Frequent visitors to Rhodes, my wife Agnes and I, on our 14th visit there, (you could say I'm almost addicted to that island) decided to visit the last remaining Sephardic Jewish Synagogue on the island. There had been six but this was the last remaining.

The Kahal Kadosh Shalom (Holy Congregation of Peace) was built in 1577 by Sephardic (Spanish) Jews, who had been expelled by the Spanish Inquisition after declining the 'offer' of Catholic baptism, were then invited by the Turks to settle in Rhodes following the defeat and expulsion of the Knights of Rhodes by the Sultan Suleiman in 1522. The seeds of bigotry were sown then by the decree of death for any Greek found within the city walls after dusk, while this law did not apply to the Jews. Rhodes remained under Turkish Ottoman rule until occupied by the Italians in 1912.

I am not a religious person, to say the least, but on entering the Synagogue, head covered by a hat in respect of Jewish tradition, I approached a handsome rabbi and his wife and greeted them with 'Shalom'. I asked in my inadequate faltering Greek if photography was allowed and he replied in English that it was and directed me to a guide who was standing nearby. This young lady was from the Philippines and we soon shared the information that I was from Scotland and that although her Greek was infinitely better than mine she spoke excellent English. After taking several photographs of the Synagogue and Museum she invited me to visit the Holocaust Room and it was there that I encountered the photograph of Alexander Angel.

The magnitude of the Nazi horror, some of which we have seen in newsreels and photographs is almost unimaginable.



Alexander Angel in his yellow star
© Rhodes Jewish Museum

I had known that the Jews had been deported from Rhodes to the death camps (at the 'late' date 23 July 1944 !!!) and I had read the plaque above a school door in Montmartre telling of the children who were taken from that primary school to Auschwitz 'Simply because they were Jews', but this boy's picture put a face and a name to the nightmare.

Alexander Angel, well named indeed, a very handsome 7 or 8 year old was pictured wearing the yellow Star of David. Let us not imagine that Mussolini's Fascists were not racists, they were...by their *own* laws, but the wearing of the Star was not mandatory as it was in Germany and in the Reich-occupied territories. Young Alexander was wearing it as a badge of pride. I would have loved to have met this fine young gentleman but he was murdered in Auschwitz at the age of 8 years. I was about two months old at the time. Bigotry and ignorance were not confined to Rhodes, far from it, but their

various strands were there and in a concentrated and localised form.

The Greeks hated the Muslim Turks mutually, the Italian Catholics were at odds with the Greek Orthodox, the Christians (?) in general were against Judaism. There was not much love for the Gypsies either. Man's inhumanity to Man. Let us not be fooled into thinking that Man is a 'noble' creature, higher than the animals and made in the image of god. Man is only an animal with a higher level of intellect than other animals... (we like to think so), but without ethics, morals, standards and laws (enforced if necessary), we are only another species of animal.

We have in the Worship Room at Glasgow Unitarian Church a tapestry/wall hanging which has a bright yellow star on it. From now on for me that star will represent Alexander Angel.

Jim McKenna is a member of the Glasgow congregation.

50 years of good work honoured

By Sandy Ellis

A large crowd of friends from eight different Midland Unitarian Association congregations gathered at Warwick on Sunday, 17 May to join in a Service of Celebration marking 50 years of service to the Denomination by Malcolm Sadler. The service was conducted by the Rev Ant Howe who was accompanied on the piano by Malcolm.

Ant recalled the chapel was a different place when Malcolm first joined in 1959, with traditional pews, inadequate heating, a crumbling fabric and a dwindling congregation.

Ant then invited Malcolm to describe some of the musical events which followed his arrival. Malcolm explained that he had been the organist at Waverley Road Church when he was invited to move to Warwick. In those days, the old pipe organ stood at the south end of the chapel and playing it created a loud howling sound from the blower motor situated in a corru-

gated iron shed in the garden outside. It had to be switched off after each hymn to avoid complaints from the neighbours! The organ gave up the ghost in mid-hymn during the second time that he played it, necessitating the use of a piano to complete the hymn! It was replaced with a smaller portable instrument which was still present in the upper



Malcolm Sadler

room many years later. In the ensuing years, Malcolm was able to recruit a series of musical ensembles to enliven the services and when it became impossible to recruit a minister, he

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A welcome that never Flaggs

By Scott Hermiston

Nine years ago, my new girlfriend confessed to me that she was a member of a religious denomination of which I had never previously heard. She did so because she wanted me to come with her to a place called Flagg for a camping weekend, so she could introduce me to her friends and fellow Unitarian travellers. I bravely dispelled the visions of slaughtering goats by moonlight and signing my worldly goods over to their leader, bought a tent, took the plunge and have never looked back.

That first visit being introduced as Helen's new boyfriend to some 30 people (most of whom I had never met before) was nowhere near as daunting as I was expecting, and in fact I felt as welcome there as I could possibly have hoped for. The attendees were consistently both friendly towards me and interested in me, which made the weekend race by rather quicker than I'd expected. A wedding and the arrival of a little girl later my enthusiasm for Flagg still seems to be growing, as does the group of people that attend the Welcome Weekend on the second Bank Holiday weekend in May.

In that first visit to Flagg, I found a group of adults of two distinct age groups – those in their 30s and those over 60. However, I also wondered how many groups of families and individuals like this have no members under 30. I'm pleased to report that whilst the Welcome Weekend has retained and added to its selection of interesting 30s-40s and 60+s, it now boasts an under-6 cohort of 11 mentalists. My favourite fact, however, is that the age difference between youngest and oldest member of the community is over 90 years. And they're equally involved.

I would challenge you to find a more interesting group of people to mix with for a weekend; I dipped in and out of conversations about such diverse topics as women's rights in India, growing organic vegetables on allotments, 14-16 education policy, diminishing specialist land knowledge in Andalusia, how to bake the perfect chocolate brownie and lemon cake, whether princesses are better than Power Rangers – the list seems endless. The weekend had a record (in my experience) attendance of over 50, with more than 20 tents in the Barn Field and dinner served to 50 on the Saturday night. All it needed to get a spot on the festival circuit was an acoustic and comedy tent.

And here's the rub – Flagg is bang in the middle of one of England's most beautiful areas, the Derbyshire High Peak. I like a glass or two of an evening, but nothing diminishes the view you get from your tent door when you get up in the morn-



Scott Hermiston chops onions outside the barn at Flagg. Photo by John Hewerdine

ing. The Welcome Weekend includes a led walk in the Peak on the Sunday, available for any level of speed or endurance – my 4-year-old enjoyed the long walk at her own pace, but the toddlers and oldies had a shorter alternative. Three square meals a day are cheerfully prepared and served to all-comers by various 'Flaggites', together with a bottomless pot of tea and the assembled cakes of those diligent enough to have baked before they came.

The Welcome Weekend is open to all (enquire at **flagg.barn@lycos.com**) and I stand before you as proof that you will be welcome. I cannot recommend it enough for anyone who enjoys good company, hearty food, beautiful countryside, the Unitarian heritage of the Barn and the Green, and nowadays the growing of a new youth wing of the denomination.

I'm going to draw to a close now by stating my case (of which I'm certain) – I am not a Unitarian. However I think that Unitarianism has much to be proud of, given the qualities of its adherents that I meet at Flagg. My daughter will be welcome to make her mind up when she's ready, but I rather hope she chooses to follow her mother into Unitarianism. Any denomination that brings together a community such as welcomed me to Flagg these nine long years ago, maintains it, grows it, and welcomes all who would be associated with it, is ok by me. I would personally like to invite you to the next Welcome Weekend to enrich the community of friendship that we share. Join us to experience the endlessly fascinating discussions beside the metaphorical camp fire, imbibing from your cup of tea/glass of wine/sippy-cup of warm milk in the unique High Peak evening light.

Malcolm Sadler is honoured at Warwick

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accepted appointment as Lay Leader himself. There followed a long struggle to complete a massive programme of renovation which involved replacing the ceiling, removing the pews, replacing the floor, redecorating the chapel in bright colours, creating a new kitchen and reclaiming the now-beautiful garden behind the chapel.

Three flats were created in the adjacent building to form the basis of future income. Ant said that without Malcolm's determined leadership over so many years, the congregation was

unlikely to have survived. He pointed out, that, not content with these Herculean efforts on behalf of the congregation, Malcolm had made a significant contribution at both District and National level, being a past president of the Midland District, secretary of the District Ministers' Meeting and secretary for many years of the Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders.

Ant then read letters of congratulation from the president of the General Assembly, the president of the Midland Unitarian Association and from the Rev John Clifford, a former minister of the congregation.

—Sandy Ellis is a member of Warwick Unitarians

Diversity banner expresses more than 'Pride'

To the Editor:

I have nothing against Gay Pride, indeed I marched for Gay Pride in London, a most inspiring event in spite of torrential rain and threat of bombs. But why on Earth describe the new banner (*Unitarians Celebrate the Diversity of Creation*) as if it is only meant for Gay Pride events? (*Inquirer*, 30 May) We, of Edmund Kell Church, Southampton marched with the banner on a recent Sunday in the Interfaith Peace Walk. It was extremely appropriate as we visited churches, temples, mosques, and gurdwaras – along with hundreds of folk from many religions. We met only with a friendly response and it was certainly good publicity for the Unitarian cause. If folk feel that its use is so limited, then it is no surprise that we were the only church to



The Diversity banner was unveiled at the GA meetings

use it up until that time.

Let it be used in all public events!

Brenda Knopf

Southampton

Excellent point, thank you. The editor regrets the implication.

Professional leadership is essential to growth

To the Editor:

In his letter in the 13 June *Inquirer*, Peter Witham addresses comments I made at the May meeting of the GA Executive Committee (EC). I asserted and believe very strongly that dedicated professional leadership is essential to the growth of our movement. By 'professional leadership,' I mean people with a high level of training and proficiency in preaching, pastoral care, congregational dynamics, growth, publicity, and all the many basics of religious leadership including history and theology. Often, professional leadership means clergy, but it need not. Experience clearly shows that dedicated professional leadership is essential – although not by any means sufficient – for congregational growth.

Peter points out, quite correctly, that growth is like both chicken and egg: professional leaders are needed to generate growth, and growth is also needed to attract and support those same professional leaders! The answer is that we must engage with multiple strategies at once: while we sustain our congregations in whatever way we must (such as making best use of volunteer leadership as in the 'future ministry' initiative) we must also work to put in place the means to deploy more professional leadership in the future. I think it is most helpful to think about profes-

sional leadership and growth as part of a potentially 'virtuous cycle': more of one will lead to more of the other in a self-reinforcing way. We need to get that cycle moving in the right direction in every way we can. Virtual cycles can also be death spirals if we allow them to operate in reverse.

If we are to have more professional congregational leadership in a few years, we will need to overcome a number of challenges: we need to find ways to recruit, train and deploy more trained professional leaders and we need to find ways to help our congregations access the funds they need to support professional leadership.

To prepare for the future, we need to begin work on a variety of new initiatives today. The presence of 'Paid Professional Leadership' on the EC's list of key priorities reflects this need and I expect that we will work closely with the relevant staff, Commissions, and Panels to put in place plans designed to recruit, train, deploy and support more professional leadership for our congregations.

Andrew Pakula

Executive Committee member

Andrew Mason is an able deputy

To the Editor:

In his letter wondering what is happening at Essex Hall, (*The Inquirer*, 13 June) Mike Tomlin suggests that Peter Teets 'seemed to have taken on the



Andrew Mason

role of unofficial deputy at Essex Hall'.

Peter's resignation is a loss, but it is also possible to say that Andrew Mason has a role as an 'unoffi-

cal deputy'.

Fortunately for us all Andrew is still playing a vital role at our HQ. Long may he continue to do so.

Peter Godfrey

King's Stanley, Stonehouse

Authority of officers is set by EC

To the Editor:

I write with reference to Roy Smith's letter about the power which GA Chief Officers (whether called General Secretary or Chief Executive) have had. Charity trustees, however they organise themselves (Executive Committee or GA Council) have the legal responsibility for ensuring that their charity works to its constitution and within charity, as well as other, laws. The trustees have the authority to make decisions – they may then delegate significant portions (but not all) of that authority to staff and/or sub-committees (our commissions).

Whilst I suspect that much of the authority of the General Secretaries was theirs by default, rather than conscious-

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Use technology well or fade away

By Janet Briggs

As soon as I read in the GA List about the discussions to be held at Essex Hall over the summer, under the auspices of the World Congress of Faiths, part-funded by our Faith and Public Issues Commission, I thought, 'I wish I could be there.' But it's a long way from my home in Scotland. Then, 'I hope someone writes them up for *The Inquirer*.' But even if they do, and do it well, so that we have a real flavour of the meetings, it will only reach a percentage of our small community of Unitarians, and that in the privacy of their homes. If the discussions could be video recorded, a DVD could be made available which could be used to stimulate discussion meetings in our churches, or even out with our churches in local interfaith sessions. So I sent emails to various likely and prominent Unitarians.

I can see that it is relatively easy to attract worthwhile speakers to a central London headquarters venue, and it is not too much to hope for an audience consisting of their own followers and members of the several local London Unitarian churches. These advantages ought to be made available for sharing around more isolated and distant groups, to help in facilitating interesting discussion meetings and in fostering a



Janet Briggs

sense of connection with each other and with Essex Hall. It seemed so simple.

But I learnt that we do not have the infrastructure to make it possible. Apparently we would have to find a volunteer willing and able to travel to London and use his own equipment and then spend his spare time editing the results to make a usable DVD. And we wonder why our numbers are so small! Surely it is part of the transformative change that we so badly need, to embrace some modern technology, spend some money on it and reach out to our members, offering them something that could even be used in a wider context as well. The same technique could be used in so many ways, for training sessions for small groups, for meditation, even for worship.

Don't tell me that some chapels do not have the equipment to do this. I'm sure that most homes do. When there are not enough ministers to go round, some fresh ideas would surely be welcomed, and would ease the strain on hard-pressed volunteers. And as for the cost, compare postage of a DVD with preaching fee and expenses for a speaker. If we are too set in our ways and too tight-fisted to make use of technology when it can help us, we deserve to fade away.

Janet Briggs is a member of the Glasgow congregation.

Letters

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ly delegated. A 25-person GA Council meeting three or four times a year would have found it difficult to exercise much of its authority or even to decide how else it could be exercised.

However our Executive Committee of nine, which meets bi-monthly for two days and in between times is connected via email, will have made a very conscious decision about the amount of authority that the Chief Executive had. It is not the structure which has dictated this but the people involved.

Louise Rogers

Newcastle-under-Lyme Meeting House

EC article an example of cheap, gutter press

To the Editor:

I cannot for the life of me understand the sentiment, or what value is there to the article printed by Jim Corrigan in *The Inquirer* of 30 May under the title *New Executive set out its priorities*. Our expectations are for the EC to work as a collaborative body and perform their duties in the process of governing our denomination so that it becomes a vi-

brant unified movement moving in a certain direction. I voted for the change in Governance as I believed there was a need for a more streamlined decision making process which was not available under the old GA Council. I also participated in the voting procedure this year as I could see that the first term of office the EC did very important work as a team in providing leadership and a certain sense of direction to congregations, district associations, Unitarian members and, very importantly, the GA staff at Essex Hall. I was confident that this very important strategic process should remain.

There is some very important and useful information in Jim's article but it is also tainted with innuendoes which are more akin to the cheap, gutter press – which I have no interest in whatsoever. Yes, I do wish to know what decisions were made and what are the structures and procedures that are implemented. But, sorry, I have no interest whatsoever in Mr Corrigan's personal views of the first meeting – especially who sat where and when. It is childish, immature, ir-

responsible and cheap.

But, most of all, it is discourteous to all those named and is totally irrelevant to what we the readers expect from a member of our governing body to include in his or her report.

Maybe it is my personal problem but I have never been interested in the press gossip columns. Somehow it does not bode well for a religious movement to carry out similar activities.

We deserve better.

May I kindly suggest to Mr Corrigan that he concentrates on carrying out his designated responsibility as a link person to the both Eastern Union and South East Wales District Associations as well as his links to Commissions and any other relevant strategic work entailed in his responsibilities as an EC member and to use his no-doubt able and professional journalistic skills more appropriately.

Cen Llwyd

Talgarreg

(The column to which this column refers appeared on a page sponsored by the EC and, therefore, was not edited by the Inquirer editor.)



New chalice given

During a recent service at Cribyn chapel in Wales, three members presented a chalice to the congregation to hold a candle, which is now used during services at the chapel. It was specially commissioned by the three members and was hand made by a local craft maker, Andrew Davies.

Mattie Evans, Cynthia Griffiths and Eurwen Davies are shown together with the Rev Ceu Llwyd.



Engagement groups: Sharing the Spiritual Journey

Engagement Groups and Small Group Ministry will offer a 24-hour training session on 16-17 October at Luther King House, Manchester, M14 5JP. The sessions are geared for facilitators, would-be facilitators, and engagement group participants.

This 24-hour gathering with a theme of 'Engagement groups: Sharing the Spiritual Journey Through Diverse Group Activities' is intended to bring together facilitators of small groups from across the country, to make connections, share experiences, and build confidence. Through practical workshop sessions and experiential activities we will consider some simple principles that everyone can learn to make a success of small group ministry.

Join us to explore the wonders of small groups in which our spiritual potential can unfold.

Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. The deadline is 1 September 2009. The cost is £25 per person (cost is subsidised by the Education and Training Commission). It includes accommodation, meals, and conference fee. The training will run from late Friday afternoon until Saturday lunchtime.

Please send cheques, payable to 'General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches', to Engagement Support, GA, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY.

For further information please email: info@unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk

— Jane Blackall

New videos posted on NUF website

The DUWIT Team (Development of Unitarian Websites and IT) is pleased to announce that the videos recorded at the General Assembly meetings held at Chester are now available on line via the National Unitarian Fellowship (NUF) web site www.nufonline.org.uk and can be found in the left-hand

menu under the titles 'Personal Views' and 'Unitarianism'.

'Personal Views' is a collection of statements made by Tony McNeile, Hazel Clark, Jane Barraclough, Jef Jones and Steven Lingwood on the subject of their Unitarian journeys.

'Unitarianism' is a collection of videos by the Rev David Usher, member of the executive committee, answering questions on Unitarianism and what it means.

The videos are also available on the Ukunitarian web site www.ukunitarians.org.uk and directly on You Tube (www.youtube.com).

— James Barry

Hinckley chair honoured for contributions

Hinckley Great Meeting chapel chairperson, Margaret Horton has received a Cross ball point pen, a lapel badge and a certificate after donating her 50th pint of blood to the National Blood Bank.

— Eric Oliver

'Dances of Universal Peace' at Derby

Friar Gate Chapel, Derby plans a day of Dances of Universal Peace, on Saturday, 25 July, from 10.30 till 4pm.

Dances of Universal Peace are easy, fun, spiritual and joyful circle dances, using words from various sacred traditions from around the world – such as Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Native American, Buddhist, etc.

The Dances are essentially a form of celebration and meditation in sound and movement. The words, melodies and simple dance steps are always explained before each dance, so it is easy for beginners to quickly become comfortable. You do not need a partner.

The day will be lead by Aziz Dixon, a leader of Dances of Universal Peace. This looks to be a very enjoyable event, which the congregation plans to hold quarterly.

Tickets cost £20 in advance, or £25 on the door. Concessions are available – please ask. The full address of the venue is Friar Gate Unitarian Chapel, Ground Floor, Heritage Gate Offices, Stafford Street, Derby DE1 1JG. Parking is available.

For more information about Dances of Universal Peace, see our website at www.derbyunitarians.org.uk

Or, send cheques please, to Friar Gate Unitarian Chapel, c/o Janet Granger, Rose Cottage, Leek Road, Waterhouses, Staffordshire, ST10 3JS. Include your full name and address, and your email address for confirmation by email, or an SAE for postal confirmation. Advance booking preferred. Telephone Janet on 01538 308860 for further information.

— Janet Granger



A 'Dance of Universal Peace'